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SUBJECT: EGYPT SEEKS TO CONTINUE USE OF AWGA-NITZANA FOR  
RETURN OF PALESTINIANS TO GAZA

REF: TEL AVIV 2460

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs  
William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) A representative of the Liaison Agency with International Organizations (LAWIO) told poloff during an August 15 meeting at the Awga-Nitzana border crossing that Egyptian-Israeli coordination for the return of 6,372 Palestinians to Gaza (via Israel) during the period July 29-August 12 was smooth. He said officials moved the Palestinians from holding camps at a stadium in Al Arish to Awga via bus (60 passengers per bus). After GOE officials screened the travelers' identity documents and luggage at a terminal at Awga, the Palestinians traveled by bus to the border line where Israeli officials met them. On average, the official said, Egypt transferred 800-900 passengers per day, but numbers reached 1,300 on one day during the period.

2. (C) Egypt and Israel have not opened the crossing since August 12, the LAWIO official said, but Egypt would like to do so both to return additional Palestinians, as security permits, and to allow Palestinians (and perhaps others) to enter Egypt. The official said negotiations with Israel are underway regarding the use of the crossing, but he could not comment substantively on them. The official noted that the Palestinians still held in GOE-controlled camps in the Sinai (111 in Rafah, 68 in Al Arish, and 28 at the Al Arish airport) are frustrated that they are confined "like prisoners." But he stressed that the GOE will continue to detain them until their status is resolved. A more senior LAWIO official based in Cairo said coordination with Israel for the transfer of the remaining Palestinians, some of whom wish to go to the West Bank, is underway and going well, but that identity checks will take time.

3. (C) Since the Hamas takeover in June, Egyptian media had been reporting daily on the plight of the stranded Palestinians - raising pressure on the GOE to take action on a very sensitive subject. By working with the Israelis and the Palestinian effectively, the Egyptians were able to resolve the issue favorably. We will convey to the GOE that effective cooperation such as this should serve as a model for the GOE to address other Sinai challenges.

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